

TRANSIT Times

Inside this issue:

2

Gary's column

Riders Express Gratitude

3

Fond du Lac Area Transit

Shared-ride Taxis

4

Save the Date! Fall Transit
ConferenceStrong, Vickman Join
Oshkosh Transit

Transit Works

A Tale of Three Cities

Public transportation provides vital services to citizens of large and small communities throughout Wisconsin.

This issue of *Transit Times* highlights three systems – where and whom they serve, and how they've made use of available funding to keep their communities economically and socially viable. Public transit is more important than ever in all venues in light of rising gas prices and other economic pressures, concern for our climate, etc.

Last year, according to WisDOT, 71 public transit systems operated in the state, including 39 shared-ride taxi systems. All told, they provided about 73 million revenue transit rides per year.

Public transit is essential to our state's and our citizens' well-being. It's something we can't afford to lose.



La Crosse school children learn to ride the MTU bus.

La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility

Urbanized System

History

The City of La Crosse took over the privately owned La Crosse Transit Co. in December 1974, following several years of growing financial losses, despite subsidies from the city since 1970. The Common Council created a Municipal Transit Utility (MTU) to manage the operations. The MTU quickly secured a substantial amount of new capital equipment to replace aging buses inherited from the private operator. La Crosse has kept its fleet rejuvenated and reliable over the years through the use of statewide federal capital funding grants. This July, a new mixed-use downtown Transit Center financed by an innovative public/private partnership got the go-ahead, with construction beginning soon and expected completion in fall of 2009.

La Crosse MTU Transit Manager Keith Carlson Comments:

We've been fortunate – and always have been – that we've had strong local support for transit. We have managed to maintain our service levels, even during tough years when federal and state funding have been reduced, which shows the city's dedication to transit riders.

What we're doing in transit is part of the solution regarding jobs, energy and economic development. MTU also helps reduce parking needs and, in fact, the need for cars at all for students. Our U-Pass program in partnership with three local colleges allows students to ride free with a student ID and produces additional revenue. We've provided almost one million U-Pass rides in the eight years since the program started. The additional service from the campus to the mall or downtown, benefits everyone in the community. It's a good investment.

We are seeing new riders due to higher gas prices and the general economy. Using transit is a way for people to save money on at least some of their trips. Ridership increased by 4% so far this year over last year.

see *Transit Works*, page 3



WISCONSIN
URBAN & RURAL
TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

'I'd like to introduce you to Fritz Ruff!'

Wisconsin Considers Authorizing, Funding RTAs

By Gary R. Goyke, WURTA Legislative Representative



My first memories of Fritz Ruff go back to 1976. Fritz was a prominent player in the early years of the interstate banking wars, a sturdy and creative player in that decade-long process.

As a member of a State Senate Committee on Financial Institutions, chaired by Sen. Tim Cullen, I attended lots of meetings in which Fritz participated. Those hearings resulted in an equitable interstate banking code for Wisconsin.

Fritz went on to head the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA). He currently serves on the Waukesha County Board. His Pewaukee neighborhood is like a quiet cul-de-sac in the eye of a gathering transportation storm in Southeastern

Wisconsin. I was delighted to see his name on the final Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Special Committee roster because he always brings his best to any endeavor or challenge and is ready to bring his talents to bear by finding workable solutions.

Fritz, like all 22 committee members, brings to the table many unique talents and experiences. This remarkable group is comprised of six Legislators and 18 public members, including mayors, city managers, representatives of various interest groups around the state – and yes, even three transit managers. Each has equally impressive credentials and interest in gathering to discuss, reason and recommend policies that stand a very good chance of becoming law.

The committee – the first in Wisconsin to study this important issue – is led by Chair Rep. Alvin Ott and Vice-Chair Sen. Judy Robson. Members will review and

provide recommendations on how to create a statutory framework enabling counties, cities, villages and towns to create RTAs to promote regional cooperation on transportation issues. They will determine: funding mechanisms; methods to create an RTA; representation and participation by member governmental units; types of authorized transportation services; and RTAs' scope and limits.

I urge everyone to take an active interest in following this committee's actions. Its deliberations will tackle one of the biggest issues confronting the Legislature next January and will ultimately shape the future of public transportation in Wisconsin.

Find a link to the Legislative Council Special Committee on Regional Transportation Authority website at www.wurta.com.

Riders Call Public Transit 'Fantastic!'

Riders Express Gratitude for Public Transit

Beth Miner doesn't drive. She's been legally blind her whole life, making her dependent on public transit for getting to and fro in La Crosse, and farther out.

She is a long-time Municipal Transit Utility (MTU) rider and a member of its ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Advisory Committee. She became an MTU rider in 1992 and moved to the Village of Holmen, about three miles away, a decade later.

"I now use the Onalaska/Holmen/West Salem Public Transit shared-ride because the bus doesn't come to Holmen," Beth said, adding, "at least not yet, but we're hoping...."

That gets her to Valley View Mall where she picks up the MTU bus, which takes her to work, shopping, community events and doctors' appointments – including at the Gunderson Clinic.

"It's a fantastic service. In my belief, if we did not have MTU, it would cripple La Crosse because so many people depend on it." She puts employees of sheltered workshops and students at the top of her list. "Without the transportation, I would be isolated or have to spend an awful lot of money on cabs," she added.

Jaralee and Troy Richter, both employees of the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, started leaving the car in the garage and using MTU three years ago "when gas prices went above \$2 a gallon."

"Riding the bus has become such a part of our lifestyle," Jaralee said.

They ride to work, taking their youngest son along to the campus daycare. The UW is one of MTU's partners via the U-Pass program, which provides bus passes to students and employees. The Richters are such big fans of transit, they have actively helped promote bus riding among their fellow employees.

"We love it, the service is fantastic – door-to-door," Troy said. "We don't drive unless we have to. It's environmentally and economically a better choice and it's convenient."

Now, with ever higher gas prices, it's really paying off financially, as well as in lowered emissions and no parking hassles. Also, Jaralee noted, riding the bus offers a sense of community and a chance to get to know a more diverse population (e.g., disabled people who get a helping hand from the drivers), a lesson they share with their four sons.

Transit Works continued from page 1

Demand for service is growing, not only within our service area, but outside the City of La Crosse, which speaks to the need for RTA legislation and funding. We hope that our service will always meet our community's needs.

Fond du Lac Area Transit

Urbanized System

History

Fond du Lac City Bus Lines was founded after the sale of the local bus line by Wisconsin Power and Light Co. in 1944, when WPL left the transit business in several state communities. Rising costs and stagnant ridership forced a halt to bus operations in December 1967 (as in many cities in the state and nation). Public transit was not restored until August 1968 when the City Council authorized the Fondy Area Bus Cooperative to begin service, believing that a cooperative, assisted by private citizens and businesses, could be supported in lieu of a publicly financed system.

The co-op struggled, and in 1972 the city passed a subsidy referendum to cover operating losses and the bus line became publicly owned. Fond du Lac was one of the first small cities in the state to purchase brand new full-size buses in 1978, signaling the intent to modernize and expand the system. However, by the early 90s the city opted for demand-response service with small buses to cut costs. In 2003 it was reclassified as an urbanized area (50,000+ population), becoming the smallest urbanized city in the U.S. operating a fixed-route public transit system.

Transit Manager Lynn Gilles Comments:

Fond du Lac Area Transit has had a rough ride over the years, but thanks to the foresight of local leaders, it's back on track.

When we became an urbanized area, we lost 40% of our routes due to reduced funding. Although we're not anywhere near our previous ridership, we're trying to take baby steps to regain lost ground. (The system's ridership peaked in 1981 with more than 456,000 public transit trips.) We started adding routes in 2005, mostly peak a.m.s and p.m.s on our most heavily used routes.

We've had continuing growth in both ridership and revenues



since 2005. Ridership is up 8-9% since the first of this year. People do realize the importance of public transit.

Going forward, I'd like to see more service and the ability to create more viable options, such as having a half-hour headway (now an hourly loop). We've been trying to add half-hours to gain back routes we began losing in the early 1980s.

Ripon Taxi

Rural Shared-taxi System

History

WisDOT regards shared-ride taxi systems as a means of providing public transportation service in smaller communities. Wisconsin's shared program began in 1978 in Ripon with state assistance. Federal assistance from the then Section 18 program was added the next year. Initially, funding was available to communities with populations of 5,000 or more, but the population threshold was dropped to 2,500 or more in the 80s. The services, generally contracted by municipalities to state-qualified private-sector providers, are demand responsive and rides may be shared with other users. Last year WisDOT stats show, the rural and small town shared-ride taxi program included 39 systems providing 1,524,200 rides. Shared-ride systems exist in communities ranging in size from the 22,000 population in Watertown and 19,000 in Wisconsin Rapids to 4,300 in Medford and Mauston and 2,700 in Neillsville.

Brown Cab Service Inc. Owner Pat McGinty Comments:

McGinty bought the Fort Atkinson-based Brown Cab, a private taxi service, in 1985 and started his first shared-ride system in 1986 in Whitewater. The business has grown to include shared-ride taxi service in 13 Southeast and South Central Wisconsin communities.

In the late 1970s Ripon Taxi became the state's first publicly funded shared-ride system.

Many of our customers depend solely on transit for mobility. With an aging and growing elderly population, the demand for shared-ride taxi has also grown.

see Transit Works, page 4

	La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility		Fond du Lac Area Transit		Ripon Taxi	
Size/ Service Area	Cities of La Crosse, Town of Campbell, & La Crescent, Minn. City of La Crosse pop. 51,800 20 buses – 8 fixed, 2 flex routes 42 full-time, 5 part-time employees		Cities of Fond du Lac & North Fond du Lac area pop. about 50,000 covering 20 sq. mi. 7 buses 8 full-time employees		City of Ripon pop. 6,828 covering 4.3 sq. mi. 4 sedans, 1 accessible van 10 full-time employees	
2007 ridership	1,043,403		approx. 180,000		34,500	
Structure	City-owned		City-owned under Dept. of Community Development		Operated by Brown Cab Service Inc. under city contract	
Revenue Sources	Federal 30%	Fares 30%	Federal 30%	Fares 19%	Federal 34.22%	Local 5%
	State 25%	Misc. 3%	State 25%	Misc. 4%	State 30.78%	Fares 30%
	Local 12%		Local 22%			

Transit Works continued from page 3



Ripon passenger Adeline Bruins, who never learned to drive, has used the shared-ride taxi service since it started in the 1970s to take her to work, the store, to her doctor and dentist – everywhere she needs to go. The retiree says, “We’re so lucky we have a cab service; I don’t know what we’d do if we didn’t.”

As towns have sprawled, transit rides have become longer. In many cities, essential services have moved from the downtown areas to the outlying spaces. Some towns have initiated shared-ride services in response.

Ripon’s transit is available seven days each week with additional night service offered until 2 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. The service is closed on some holidays.

Fuel costs have had an impact on local share budgeting. Due to fast-rising operational costs, some transit systems may have to make choices regarding service levels and capital replacements due to local budget constraints.

Save the Date!!

2008 Wisconsin Transit Fall Conference

September 8 -10

Country Springs Hotel • 2810 Golf Road, Waukesha



The Wisconsin Transit Conference is hosted by the Wisconsin Association of Taxicab Owners, Wisconsin Rural and Paratransit Providers and the Wisconsin Urban and Rural Transit Association, with host system Waukesha Metro Transit. Look for information and a link to on-line registration on the WURTA website – www.WURTA.com. For room reservations, call 1-888-540-7016 or www.countryspringshotel.com

Strong, Vickman Join Oshkosh Transit

Christopher Strong, P.E., is the new Transit Director for the Oshkosh Transit System.

Most recently, Strong was a program manager for safety and operations for the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University in Bozeman. He was principal investigator, overseeing four full-time researchers in intelligent transportation systems, traffic engineering and highway operations. Previously, he worked as a transportation planner at the Chicago office of Wilbur Smith Associates. The Seattle native earned his B.S. in civil engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, and an M.S. in engineering from the University of Texas at Austin.

Dave Vickman has been hired as OTS’ Transit Coordinator. He had been Program and Planning Analyst in the Bureau of Transit and Local Roads for the Wisconsin DOT, where he worked for eight years on policy and funding. Vickman, from Denmark, Wis., has a B.S. in political science and public administration from the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay.



Christopher Strong



Dave Vickman



**754 Williamson Street
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 255-1166**

www.wisconsintransit.org

Executive Board

Dave Mumma, Chair
Transit Director
Janesville Transit System
mummad@ci.janesville.wi.us

Anita Gulotta-Connelly, Vice Chair
Managing Director
Milwaukee County Transit System
aconnelly@mcts.org

Lynn Gilles, Secretary
Transit Manager
Fond du Lac Area Transit
lgilles@ci.fond-du-lac.wi.us

Herb Mallinger, Treasurer
Finance Director
Milwaukee County Transit System
hmallinger@mcts.org

Robert C. Johnson, At-Large
Transit Director
Waukesha Metro Transit
rjohnson@ci.waukesha.wi.us

Ron McDonald, At-Large
Transit Director
Sheboygan Transit System
rmcdonald@ci.sheboygan.wi.us

Pat McGinty, Taxicab Member
Owner, Brown Cab Service
browncab@sbcglobal.net

Randy Veenhoven, Vendor Member
USSC Seating
rveenhoven@usscseating.com



www.wisconsintransit.org

for more extensive information on the state’s public transportation systems and providers. The site is an excellent resource for consumers, policymakers and others interested in the transit industry. You’ll also find archives of the WURTA *Transit Times*, charts on the business of transit and other useful information.